

Meeting of the Children's Cabinet

*Thursday, April 1, 2021
12:00 PM – 1:30 PM
Virtual Meeting Over Zoom
1111 E Broad St, Richmond, VA 23219*

MEETING MINUTES

Members Present: First Lady Pamela Northam, Lieutenant Governor Justin Fairfax, Secretary Atif Qarni, Secretary Bettina Ring

Members Absent: Secretary Brian Moran, Secretary Daniel Carey (represented by Deputy Secretary Vanessa Walker Harris)

I. Welcome

First Lady of Virginia Pamela Northam welcomed members and attendees. She and Speaker of the House Eileen Filler-Corn provided remarks and announced an additional \$203 million of federal stimulus funding and expanded eligibility criteria for the Child Care Subsidy Program to help further stabilize Virginia's early childhood care and education systems, provide childcare assistance to additional families as they seek stable employment or return to work, and deliver operational and technical resources to new and returning child care providers.

II. Presentation from Deputy Secretary Dr. Vanessa Walker Harris, Chidi Jenkins, and Laurie Crawford

Deputy Secretary Dr. Vanessa Walker Harris provided an update on work being done in the Trauma Informed Care and Health and Human Resources space. She discussed the impact of COVID-19 on children across the Commonwealth and the Commonwealth's innovative, trauma-informed response that has included wraparound services that promote health and safety for all.

Deputy Secretary Walker Harris provided a brief update on legislation passed during the 2021 General Assembly to support the health and wellbeing of children and mothers. Additionally, she updated the Cabinet efforts to support maternal health, which included a discussion of the funding secured and legislation signed from this past legislative Session.

Chidi Uche discussed the collective work that has led to the progress and successes made by Virginia's child- and youth-serving agencies. She announced that Virginia Heals has been sustained and has been transitioned from a grant-funded project to a sustained program within the Department of Social Services. Laurie Crawford provided an update on the work that Virginia Heals will be doing moving forward.

III. Presentation from Chief School Readiness Officer Jenna Conway

Chief Conway provided an update on the Commonwealth's efforts to build a unified office focused on ensuring school readiness for all of Virginia's children and detailed its current priorities. These priorities—which are being focused on by multiple advisory committees, work groups and stakeholder groups—included:

- Supporting programs and families with COVID-19 response and recovery
- Implementing key initiatives from the 2021 General Assembly; and
- Unifying the early childhood system at the Virginia Department of Education

Chief Conway described the impact of COVID-19 on young learners, children's learning, and early childhood programs. She also shared how Virginia responded quickly to support child care providers and families through direct cash assistance and joint listening sessions to understand needs and identify strategies for deploying resources and aid.

Lastly, Chief Conway described the key initiatives from the 2021 General Assembly in the early childhood space: specifically, how new funding increased investment and seeks to reduce inequities. She additionally provided an update on the implementation of the unified early childhood system and discussed the development of quality measurement and improvement systems.

IV. Presentation from Deputy Secretary Kathy Burcher

Deputy Secretary of Education Kathy Burcher provided an update on schools' offering and expanding of in-person learning options for students. She provided a timeline of the past year and discussed the Governor's visits to schools offering in-person instruction to talk and meet with students, teachers, and staff. Deputy Secretary Burcher also discussed efforts to offer vaccinations to school personnel and noted that as of March 31, two-thirds of school personnel had received at least one dose of the vaccine and more than half of school personnel are fully vaccinated.

V. Presentation from Assistant Secretary Heidi Hertz

Assistant Secretary Hertz discussed the impacts of COVID-19 on nutrition and food security efforts and described how the pandemic has spiked the demand for food assistance across Virginia. She explained the various approaches to Virginia's united response across families, school nutrition, emergency assistance, and food distribution.

Assistant Secretary Hertz also outlined the various legislation that passed the General Assembly and signed by the Governor that advance progress in feeding VA students and families. She discussed school nutrition legislation, SNAP legislation, the Virginia Agriculture Food Assistance Program, and the Produce Rx Program.

Lastly, Assistant Secretary Hertz gave an update on the progress of Virginia's Roadmap to End Hunger.

VI. Public Comment

Eddie Oliver, *Federation of Virginia Food Banks*: Discussed how public private partnerships have been critical to addressing food insecurity throughout the pandemic.

Salaam Bhatti, *Virginia Poverty Law Center*: Discussed the need for universal school meals and rolling out the SNAP expansion created by House Bill 1820, and talked about how the Children's Cabinet can be helpful in getting the word out about this expansion.

Catherine Spacciapolli, *No Kid Hungry Virginia*: Discussed the impacts that the Commonwealth will be seeing from legislation nutrition and food access legislation and the importance of thoughtful implementation of new programs.

Emily Griffey, *Voices for Virginia's Children*: Discussed the need to ensure equity throughout systems that are intended to support Virginia's children and rethink and redesign systems that are and have been unequal.

Christian Paasch, *Virginia Chapter of National Parents Organization*: Discussed the importance of including various perspectives in conversations around children's issues as well as various policies and initiatives.

VII. Meeting Adjourned